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WOMEN WHO WORK AND WOMEN WHO SPEND

By MAUD NATHAN,
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I fear that my title implies that there are two distinct categories, and that the women who spend do not work, and the women who work do not spend. This, however, is not my inference. I merely wish to differentiate between the women whose daily occupation is spending, and who work occasionally (perhaps most when trying to spend money) and the women who work hard every day and spend money occasionally. I want to point out the relationship between the two and show, if I can, the large measure of responsibility which rests on the women who spend for some of the existing abuses and evils surrounding the women who work.

Women have always worked—but not as wage earners. When they used to work in the home they passed from the kitchen stove to the spinning wheel, from the soap vat to the vegetable garden; they made the rope, the candles, the carpets, did all the spinning, weaving, knitting, cutting and sewing. They made all their own preserves, pickles, bread, pastry and confectionery. There was sufficient variety to the work to prevent monotony and tedium at least, even though the hours of work were so long that they fell asleep over their knitting needles, and arose at dawn to get their households in order. Through the ages has come down to us the adage: "Man's work ends with the setting sun, woman's work is never done."

To-day, through the invention of cumbersome machinery, work has been taken out of the home and put into factories and workshops. Because the woman leaves her home to do work and becomes a wage-earner she is for the first time recognized as a working woman. In this new position her work has become far more monotonous. It may be her duty to stand all day long at a loom making but one little gesture. But the nervous strain is terrible; should she put her finger a quarter of an inch too near the machine it would be torn off; should she drop her hand from mere exhaustion, her work might be damaged and she would either lose some of her

wages or else perhaps lose her position. This is one reason why working women need to-day a shorter working day. The roar and buzz of machinery is deafening and nerve-racking. The air is often foul, and filled with particles of lint or wool, and because of the lack of skill or taste or intelligence required, the wage is low. If the woman works, not in a large factory, but in a tenement hovel, known as a sweat-shop, then to offset the evils described she has the fatigue of bending over a foot-power machine, she has longer hours, little light or ventilation, shorter seasons of work and lower wages.

Now, in what way can the women who spend, alleviate the conditions surrounding the women who work? There seems to be little necessity to expound upon the economic truths relating to the laws of supply and demand to the members of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. Therefore, let me merely point out the fact that since there is never a supply of anything until the demand of the purchasers be felt, and since women are largely the purchasers of the household, if all the women who spend would demand that their garments, their household furnishings and their food supplies be made under wholesome conditions—wholesome to the producer as well as to the consumer—and if they made that demand sufficiently strong and with united pressure then merchants would insist upon manufacturers complying with this demand of their customers, and manufacturers would be forced to comply in order to find a market for their wares.

Professor Gide, the renowned French economist, prophesied that the twentieth century would be the century to inaugurate the moral education of the consumer. Consumers have apparently begun their studies; we are at present in the primary grade. We no longer buy slaves, and during the Civil War some of the conscientious consumers even refused to buy the product of slave labor. We no longer buy our servants, as in the old days of indenture, but some of us seem to think we buy their entire time, and that they should have no interest in life outside of our households. We do not buy little children, but we still buy the product of child labor; we use underwear woven in Southern mills where tiny little children are allowed to work all night long; we wear shoes which they help to make in factories; hats which they braid; we trim our hats with artificial flowers which they help to make in tenement rooms. We wear silk and velvet which they help to make, assisted by huge ma-

chines which seem to be almost as intelligent and mature as the children. We use paper boxes and bags made by them; we eat candy packed by them; nuts picked by them, and we are willing to have all these things carried home to us by them, even though they arrive at a late hour at night.

Perhaps after leaving the primary grade in our studies, we shall realize that we are not intelligent consumers so long as we consume our children. If the women who work are to have good results from their labor, are to labor for life and not for death—life for the nation as well as life for themselves—then they must not commence their work at an age which spells ultimate breakdown. We consumers have had some moral education. We do not buy stolen goods, but we have not pursued our course of instruction sufficiently far to enable us to restrain from buying goods, the profits of which have been stolen from the wages or overtime work of helpless working girls. We would not buy garments bearing a tag, "tenement made," such as those tagged by the Health Department when infectious disease is found in tenement rooms where such garments are made up. But we neglect to insist that there be some label—such as the Consumers' League label—guaranteeing that the garments have been made under sanitary and uplifting conditions. The Consumers' League label further guarantees that no child labor has been employed, and no night work exacted, and that no State factory laws have been violated.

We would not buy poisons to assassinate our neighbors, but we are willing to buy wall-papers, matches and pottery which poison the producers, and we buy adulterated foods and drugs which poison the consumers. We do not buy animals to torture them, but we buy beef of cattle which before being slaughtered had been tortured almost to death on freight trains, left for days without food or drink. We do not go about ruthlessly killing little birds in their nests, but we wear aigrettes which can only be produced by capturing the mother bird when, rather than desert her little ones and leave them to starve, she prefers capture to flight. We do not go about wilfully inoculating our fellow-citizens with germs of tuberculosis, but by buying clothing made in sweatshops we encourage conditions which lead inevitably to tuberculosis. We do not deliberately fill our tenement houses with microbes, but we allow tenement houses to stand when they are so impregnated with disease germs that in one block

alone in New York city, known as "Lung Block," there has been a fresh victim of consumption every twelve days during the past nine years.

Many of us do these things quite innocently, and we look about us helplessly, wondering what we ought to do to put a stop to these evils. These I may call our sins of omission, because we do nothing to remedy matters. But there are sins of commission, of which the women who spend are guilty, and these can scarcely be condoned on the plea of ignorance.

When women order their costumes or Easter hats at the last moment they must realize that such rush orders can be completed only by exacting overtime work at night or on Sundays of the women who work. When we leave our Christmas shopping until the very last moment we are surely aware of the extra strain we are deliberately putting on those who are overburdened and exhausted at that season of the year. When we deal at stores where notoriously the saleswomen receive low wages, work long hours, get no vacations with pay, and no half-holiday in summer, we must be conscious of the fact that we are encouraging those firms which have a low standard of competition to the detriment of other firms which ought to be patronized in order to encourage a higher standard.

When we neglect to pay our bills promptly, especially when dealing with small tradesmen, we ought to realize that, perhaps through our neglect, wages of employees cannot be paid and other debts cannot be met.

Many philanthropic women who have larger incomes than they care to spend on themselves will give away large sums of money in order to provide funds for working girls who have broken down physically, mentally or morally, yet had these women, in providing for their own wants, taken the precaution to spend their money in such a way as to create favorable conditions for working girls, the workers in all probability would not have broken down and would not have required any aid.

We should not be too proud of our charitable institutions. Preventive philanthropy is far better than palliative charity. Instead of building so many hospitals for the maimed and diseased, let us create industrial conditions which will not maim and cripple working people by the wholesale, and make them diseased at an early age. Let us give them homes where the sunshine can penetrate and

parks where the children can play, and there will be fewer hospitals required.

Instead of establishing so many homes for the aged and infirm, let us pay a fair wage for work and charge less for rent and commodities, so that working people need not expend 80 per cent. of their wages for absolute necessities, which, according to statistics, the average working man does to-day.

Instead of organizing working girls' vacation societies, let us give working girls vacations with pay. If there were no cruelty enacted towards animals and children there would be no necessity for the formation of societies to prevent cruelty. If there were no injustice dealt to the poor and helpless, there would be no work for the Legal Aid Society. We should hang our heads in very shame because of our need for so many charitable institutions, we should not feel that they are a commendable source of pride.

We are constantly clamoring for very cheap lodging houses for working girls who receive pitifully low wages, but why should we encourage employers to pay pitifully low wages, and why do we countenance the rapid advance to great wealth of men who make profits in this way? The women who spend, by encouraging employers who pay fair wages and give their employees just and fair treatment are helping to better industrial conditions. By contributing towards the cramped lives of the women who work, a measure of richness and fulness, of beauty, joy and dignity, the women who spend thereby help to abolish much of the distress and misery for the lessening of which our charitable institutions are organized.

Hobson, the well-known English economist, who lectured in this country during the past season, has well said that "every purchaser by *each act of purchase* exerts a direct power of life or death over a class of producers." This is readily understood when we consider that in every industry conditions are either those which make for life—wholesome, uplifting, constructive—or those which make for death—unsanitary, degrading, destructive.

If then the women who spend will but take Ruskin's advice to heart, and "in all their buying consider first what condition of existence they cause in the producers of what they buy," there would be more of the perfume of fragrant roses, and fewer briars in the walled-in gardens where toil the women who work.